

## AMERICANIZATION AND CULTURAL IMPERIALISM IN THE AMERICAN HOTEL FRANCHISE CHAIN IN INDONESIA

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### ABSTRACT

*Americanization is a socio-cultural condition characterized by the imposition of American culture, traditions, and capitalist economic systems worldwide. In the context of modern colonialism, this is marked by the emergence and proliferation of various American brands or franchises in various locations. This fact is based on the belief that products or services with an American identity are considered to have better quality when compared to companies from other countries. This phenomenon is implicated in the hospitality business chain in Indonesia, which is marked by the large number of American hotels located in Indonesia. This article investigates the phenomenon of Americanization in the American hospitality business chain in Indonesia. This research is qualitative research using a cultural studies approach. The primary data is from interviews with 21 American Hotel guests in Indonesia. The secondary data contains related literature sources with intertextual links with the phenomenon of Americanization. Research that synergizes between cultural studies and applied management in the hospitality sector has not been found in many other studies, so this research is expected to enrich the knowledge base in the socio-cultural and hospitality fields.*

**Keywords:** Americanization, Cultural, Hotel, Franchise, Indonesia

### ABSTRAK

Amerikanisasi adalah kondisi sosial budaya yang ditandai dengan pengenalan budaya, tradisi, dan sistem ekonomi kapitalis Amerika di seluruh dunia. Dalam konteks kolonialisme modern, hal ini ditandai dengan munculnya dan menjamurnya berbagai merek atau franchise Amerika di berbagai lokasi. Fakta ini didasarkan pada keyakinan bahwa produk atau jasa dengan identitas Amerika dianggap memiliki kualitas yang lebih baik jika dibandingkan dengan perusahaan dari negara lain. Fenomena ini berimplikasi pada rantai bisnis perhotelan di Indonesia yang ditandai dengan banyaknya hotel Amerika yang berlokasi di Indonesia. Artikel ini mengkaji fenomena Amerikanisasi dalam rantai bisnis perhotelan Amerika di Indonesia. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif dengan pendekatan kajian budaya. Data primer diperoleh dari wawancara dengan 21 pengguna American Hotel di Indonesia. Sebaliknya, data sekunder berisi sumber literatur terkait dengan jaringan intertekstualitas dengan fenomena Amerikanisasi. Penelitian yang mensinergikan antara kajian budaya dan manajemen terapan di bidang perhotelan belum banyak ditemukan pada penelitian lain, sehingga penelitian ini diharapkan dapat memperkaya basis pengetahuan di bidang sosial budaya dan perhotelan.

**Kata Kunci:** Amerikanisasi, Budaya, Hotel, Waralaba, Indonesia

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## INTRODUCTION

As one of the world's superpowers, Americanization can be seen as a form of American imperialism (Kraver, 1999; Owolabi, 2001). Social, cultural and political domination positions this country as a superior country to other countries around the world. Social, cultural, and political domination positions this country as superior to other countries worldwide. American socio-cultural, economic, and cultural values that are liberal seem to spread and assimilate with other cultures across countries and continents (Parrillo, 2008). This assimilation not only has implications for the mixing of different cultures in the socio-cultural context but also imperialism and hegemony in various fundamental aspects and has socio-economic impacts.

In contemporary thought, Americanization has a negative connotation and implications for the act of imposing and influencing other countries by America in its position as a superpower (Bonnett, 2006; Kroes, 1999). Globalization in the contemporary context allows the assimilation of American culture and its ideological values into the global arena (Bonnett, 2006). The reality of America as a country with economic control is why this assimilation can occur. The demand to collaborate with America to improve the economy slowly impacts negatively on the weakening of a nation's traditions and cultural identity.

Philosophically, cultural imperialism is a form of economic hegemony from developed countries that directly or indirectly determines the direction of progress in the world's social, economic and cultural fields (Kroes, 1999; Stapell, 2016). This financial domination has implications for the dominance of these countries on various forms of media and mediums in other countries so that gradually the ideology of the

imperialist countries dominates their original culture. The United States has produced various forms of media that are communicated to all consumers. These multiple forms of media introduce American cultures, such as the American lifestyle, ideology, and work ethic. This phenomenon makes American films, music, and cultural products dominant worldwide.

Various industries in America are present worldwide; different franchise chains are in many countries (Azaryahu, 2000). McDonald's, Starbucks, and various American companies slowly dominate the global market. Confidence in the quality of products and services makes this company win in the competition with local products and services owned by other countries. It is also seen in the American hospitality industry, which is spread worldwide.

The emergence of various hotel companies based in America throughout Indonesia confirms Indonesia's position as one of the potential countries in the development of the hospitality business. St. Regis, W, Westin, Le Meridien, Four Points, Aloft, Element Starwood Hotels, which are part of Starwood Hotels and Resorts, Best Western, Fairmont Hotels and Resorts, Holiday Inn, Hyatt, Marriott, Ritz Carlton and Hotel Sheraton (*Best Wester Hotels and Resorts*, n.d.; *Fairmont Jakarta*, n.d.; *Holliday Inn*, n.d.; *Jaringan Hotel Management Dan Brand Hotel Di Indonesia*, 2017; *JW Marriot*, n.d.; *Sheraton*, n.d.; *The Ritz-Carlton*, n.d.; *World of Hyatt*, n.d.) are several American hotels built to facilitate the hospitality market throughout Indonesia. It happens because Indonesia is one of the world's most prominent tourist destinations with several strategic locations. It brings us to the question of whether the phenomenon of Americanization also influences the emergence of various branches of hotel franchises in Indonesia and whether American imperialism significantly impacts the decision to choose American hotels in Indonesia.

## METHODOLOGY

This article is based on the cultural studies approach. In this case, the social and cultural phenomenon called Americanization is seen as a social phenomenon influencing decisions in choosing hotels in Indonesia.

Two types of data were used in the study: primary data sourced from Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with 12 selected informants. All selected informants meet the mandatory criteria as follows:

1. Indonesian Citizen
2. Have used Hotel America more than twice in Indonesia.
3. The decision to choose an American hotel in Indonesia is the personal decision of the informant. Not funded by certain parties or agencies

Informants were directed to guests who have stayed at Hotel America in Indonesia at their own expense in order to be able to provide an in-depth explanation of why they still choose American hotels in Indonesia, as well as external and internal factors that drive the selection of the hotel.

Informants who meet the three criteria above are asked to attend virtually via the zoom application. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted to optimize the possible answers. There were three FGD sessions, each of which was attended by at least seven informants. So, the number of informants who attended this interview process was 21 people. Most informants requested that their identity (photo, video, and name) not be mentioned in the article but allowed the recording to be included. Every quote presented would be confirmed by the informant stated in the article.

The discussion process in each group was carried out in 30 minutes and was guided by the researcher. Questions were asked referring to the 'Term of Reference' (TOR) that was previously provided and sent the day before the interview.

Before starting the FGD, informants were asked to fill in the informant's profile information, which included gender, age, hotel name, number of visits to the hotel, purpose of visit, area of origin, and occupation. The informant's profile filling form can be seen in the attachment section.

After filling out the informant's profile, the informant was asked several questions aligned with the research objectives. All answers given were recorded and transcribed in Indonesian. The sections to be included in the text are translated into English. Answers given outside the context of the question are still considered as one of the premises or arguments that can strengthen the analysis process. The following are several questions that are summarized in the TOR.

No	Questions
1	Why did you decide to choose these hotels?
2	Did you consider the country of origin of the hotel before deciding to stay at the hotel?
3	Does your knowledge of American hotel franchises influence your decision to choose that hotel?
4	Do hotels based in America have better service quality than in other countries? If 'yes,' describe the superior aspects that American-based hotels have

**Table 1. List of Question**

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

### Finding

Profiling 21 hotel guests found that most hotel visitors are male with an age range of 30-50 years and have visited the same hotel more than three times in 2 years. The majority of informants came from Jakarta with destinations outside Jakarta. The visits are carried out in the context of work but at their own expense. The visualization of the informant's profile is presented in the following diagram.

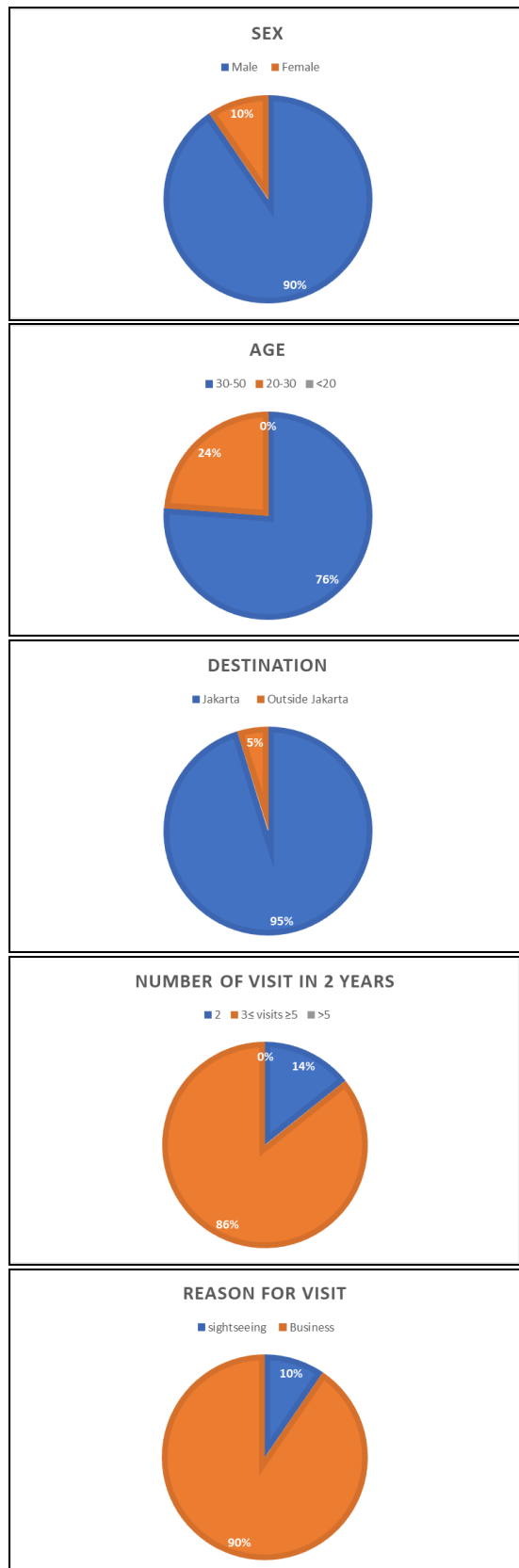


Diagram 1. Informants' Profile

Description	Sex
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Male	19
Female	2
Description	Age
30-50	16
20-30	5
<20	0
Description	Number of visits in 2 years
2	3
3 ≤ visits ≤ 5	18
>5	0
Description	Destination
Jakarta	20
Outside Jakarta	1
Description	Reason for Visit
Sightseeing	2
Business	19

Table 2. Informants' Profile

The analysis process refers to the responses given by the informants during the data collection process. Therefore, the analysis will be divided into several subsections according to the questions.

#### *Why did you decide to choose these hotels?*

Twenty-one informants (who have used hotels based in America) stated that they decided to stay in locations with many choices of places to stay. Therefore, respondents generally search through hotel booking applications. Considering the hotel's price and location, new guests decide to make a booking. Two informants stated:

#### Excerpt 1

*Before choosing a hotel outside the city, I usually look for the hotel through tiket.com or Traveloka. If the price and location were close to my new place of activity, I decided to book a room [...] if American hotels were not my main consideration. I just chose the hotel after the price was right for me. If the price is the same, I might order an American Hotel because the facilities are usually more complete and comfortable, and the service is adequate.*

#### Excerpt 2

*I must have seen the price first or the promo on tiket.com. Usually, American hotels are a bit expensive; if the price is not far from other hotels, say hundreds of thousands of rupiah, I will definitely choose an American hotel.*

Two Informants who decided to stay for sightseeing stated that there was no particular reason for them to choose an American-based hotel. They chose the hotel because the price was right and the vacation facilities were complete such as swimming pools, children's playgrounds, and most importantly, the location was close to tourist attractions.

#### Excerpt 3

*For me, the important thing is that the price is affordable, there is a swimming pool, a children's playground, and the best thing is that it is near a tourist location, so I don't need to be confused about where to go to my destination.*

However, some respondents searched for America-based hotels in their destination locations. They tend to choose the same hotel if it is done in the exact location. One of the informants stated:

#### Excerpt 4

*Every time I go to Bandung, I definitely go to Hotel X because it's clear that the breakfast menu is delicious. In addition, the hotel is luxurious and seems elite, so if I invite my business colleagues to a meeting or eat, the place is quite appropriate.*

#### ***Did you consider the country of origin of the hotel before deciding to stay at the hotel?***

Most informants stated that sometimes they did not know the country of origin of the hotel. Consideration of hotel names, hotel track records, and hotel marketing strategies may be parameters.

#### Excerpt 5

*I don't really consider the hotel I stay in from which country. It's only accurate that hotels abroad have better names than local hotels. Famous for its services and complete facilities.*

#### Excerpt 6

*As I previously said. I consider the price first before choosing a hotel [...] If it is suitable and there are several new options, I will consider whether this hotel is good regarding their track record and how they sell their hotel facilities.*

#### ***Does your knowledge of American hotel franchises influence your decision to choose that hotel?***

The informant believes that the knowledge that the hotel we will visit is an American franchise influenced the informant's decision to book the hotel. The author sees this as a form of a cultural stereotype in Indonesia. The assumption is that every product or service performed by an American-based company is always associated with a positive label such as complete or meets American service standards, which are always associated with good. This also has implications for the belief that American hotels are always labeled as elite and luxurious.

#### Excerpt 6

*Everything related to America must always be considered positive. As with hotels, American hotels are always associated with good things. Complete facilities, good service because it is considered according to American standards which are highly valued [...] Elite and luxurious so that people think American hotels must be expensive. Though not necessarily.*

#### Excerpt 7

*Not only hotels, everything related to America must have an influence maybe because we have been fed various American products, not movies, sports, and*

*entertainment [...] Everything from America must be sold or liked in Indonesia. Maybe that also makes us have the view that Hotel America also has the same quality and good as I said before.*

American identity has positive and negative impacts on prospective hotel guests and informants. Informants who emphasize quality and luxury will choose American-based hotels because of their positive stereotypes. This privilege and luxury are essential for guests who will entertain business associates or colleagues. However, in other contexts, identity impacts the decision to refuse because it is associated with a high (expensive) price.

#### Excerpt 8

*If to welcome guests or make a meal, Hotel America is definitely the right choice. Everyone also knows the quality and luxury on offer.*

#### Excerpt 9

*If I had to choose, I would definitely choose Hotel America. It will only depend on my budget. Because if I'm on vacation, there must be another purpose besides staying at the hotel.*

#### ***Do hotels based in America have better service quality than in other countries?***

The writer found that all the informants viewed America as the world standard for quality. Likewise, with hotels, American hotels are associated with American standards, which are always labeled as high quality and meet international standards. The informant believes American-based hotels have higher quality than local hotels. However, compared to other international franchise chains originating from other countries, the informants feel there is no significant difference in price and service.

#### Excerpt 10

*When compared to Indonesian hotels, I feel that the quality is quite far. But compared to other international hotels, for example, Europe, there may not be a significant difference.*

### **Discussion**

#### ***Stereotypes and Stigma in the Hotel business in Indonesia***

A stereotype is a belief held against individuals or groups of people associated with particular labels (Lampe & Anriani, 2016; Maryam et al., n.d.). The meaning of stereotypes is not always associated with negative values but also with things that are positively associated. This labeling grows in society as part of the process of assimilation and cross-cultural interaction that runs dynamically from time to time.

This article shows a correlation between American culture and the label given to the quality and service of American hotels. This article does not look at the truth of labeling but how cultural labels affect perceptions of American identity. American culture, which has become a trendsetter in various aspects (Industry, music, politics, Economy), indirectly shapes the mentality of America itself. The belief that everything based on America is good makes this label grow and develop cognitively in humans, who in this case are guests or even potential hotel guests.

The built mentality builds a positive stereotype that America-based hotels have good qualities for guests and potential guests. However, there is also negative labeling (stigma) of America-based hotels associated with high prices, which may invalidate some parties' chances of making a booking.

Another logical implication that is built is that American-based hotels have good quality. Meanwhile, local hotels have lower quality than American hotels. However, hotel quality is not the only main or most important parameter in booking a hotel. Parameters of price, distance, location, to marketing strategy, clearly have a more dominant role in influencing consumer decisions.

### ***Americanization and American Standard***

Stereotypes about the quality of American products assimilated across cultures reinforce the cultural phenomenon of 'Americanization.' In the FGD process, the authors found that the word 'American Standard' repeatedly appeared by the informants. The phrase 'American Standard' (SA) appears associatively with several other words, such as complete facilities, good service, elite, and luxury, so the SA phrase can be understood as a form of labeling given by users of American products and services, especially hotel guests.

In this perspective, SA reflects the positive stereotype of American hotels with complete facilities and quality services. On the other hand, this positive stereotype negatively impacts expensive negative labeling as a logical consequence of the facilities' quality and completeness.

From a socio-cultural perspective, the phrase SA emphasizes the phenomenon of Americanization in hospitality. The dominance of America, emphasized by the high quality of American Hotels, has made American franchise chains in Indonesia dominate specific segments of society, including groups of entrepreneurs or business people. Elite identity and luxury are the main attraction for entrepreneurs and business people to make reservations at American-based hotels in Indonesia.

### **American Imperialism in the Hotel Business in Indonesia**

The word 'imperialism' is associated with forcing and controlling, which is always juxtaposed with colonization (Kraver, 1999; Lutfi et al., 2015; Owolabi, 2001). Americanization is a derivation of modern imperialism, which has shifted from the traditional form of colonialism to domination in the economic context through industry and cultural domination. America's economic and political power makes this possible, although

not necessarily optimally, in many aspects of life.

The American stereotype in the hospitality context reflects the cultural assimilation that the hotel business is trying to build. So it can be ascertained that this phenomenon is a reflection of Americanization. However, the FGD showed that mastery in the hotel business did not make the Indonesian market experience American imperialization. In other words, Hotel America and its franchise chain have yet to dominate the Indonesian market.

Hotel guests do not entirely make America-based Hotels their first and foremost choice. Price considerations and the Stigma of high prices offered by American hotels make guests look for various variables to consider. This makes the hotel selection process begins by comparing hotel prices according to the target location of the destination. After that, guests consider choosing an American-based hotel or another hotel. At this stage, guests choose American hotels because they believe in quality and service standards.

Competing with other international hotels; American hotels cannot be said to dominate because respondents do not feel a significant difference between American hotels and other international hotels.

### **CONCLUSION**

This article shows that the Americanization phenomenon occurs in Indonesia's hotel business. The belief in American hotels' quality and service standards makes American hotels have their place in particular community groups, which in this case are dominated by entrepreneurs or business people. This study shows the influence of American identity on the decision to book a hotel. However, the phenomenon of Americanization implicated in this case cannot be viewed as a form of imperialism. Compared to international hotels based abroad, Hotel America does not dominate the Indonesian market.

This study offers a qualitative analysis model that focuses on cultural studies. The analysis

offered has the opportunity to be developed in various perspectives and other analytical methods. The author suggests that other researchers in the future consider using a more significant number of informants with different methods and paradigms.

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